Examining the Predictive Role of Self-compassion on Sense of Community in Turkish Adolescents

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Abstract   The goal of this research is to investigate the predictive role of self-compassion on sense of community. Participants were 401 high school students (211 women, 190 men). In this study, the Self-compassion Scale and the Sense of Community Scale were used. The relationships between self-compassion and sense of community were examined using correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. In correlation analysis, self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness factors of self-compassion were found positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification factors of self-compassion were found negatively related to sense of community. According to regression results, sense of community was predicted negatively by isolation. Further self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness predicted sense of community in a positive way. Self-compassion has explained 17 % of the variance in sense of community. The results were discussed within the context of the related literature.

Keywords   Self-compassion · Sense of community · Connectedness

1 Introduction

1.1 Self-compassion

Self-compassion is proposed by Neff (2003a, b) as an alternative conception of individual's achieving functional attitudes toward themselves. This concept involves being gentle towards oneself in the face of hardship or perceived inadequacy and requires

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acknowledging that suffering, failure, and inadequacies are part of the human condition (Neff 2003b; Neff et al. 2007a). As described by Neff (2003a, b) self-compassion contains three principal components: (a) Self-kindness versus self-judgment refers to an attitude of kindness and understanding to one's self as opposed to harsh judgments. Feelings of self-kindness stand in opposition to a self-critical approach in which one judges or blames oneself for challenging life events and involves actively soothing and comforting oneself in times of distress (Gilbert et al. 2006).

(b) Common humanity versus isolation indicates perceiving one's stressful and painful experiences as part of the larger human condition instead of feeling isolated and recognizing that all people make mistakes, have problems, and feel inadequate in some way. And (c) Mindfulness versus over-identification defines being mindfully aware of painful experiences without over-identifying with them. This is a state of balanced awareness that one's thoughts and feelings are observed without avoiding or trying to change them, without exaggeration and prejudice (Gunaratana 1993; Martin 1997; Neff 2003a; Nisker 1998; Rosenberg 1999). These components are experienced differently at the phenomenological level but they combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind (Neff 2003a). For example when individuals accept and tolerate their failure or painful experiences and when they are gentle and affectionate toward themselves, they may avoid suppressing their emotions and thoughts. So, if they are aware that these stressful events are something that all humans experience, they are not trapped by over-identification (Neff et al. 2005).

Studies on self-compassion have found that it is a strong predictor of psychological health and it is correlated with positive outcomes in a variety of domains such as affect, achievement, cognitive patterns, and social connections. In these studies self-compassion was related positively to life satisfaction, social relatedness (Neff 2003b), learning-approach goals (Akın 2008b), psychological well-being (Akın 2008a), reflective and affective wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity and exploration, optimism, positive affect, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness (Baker and McNulty 2011; Neff et al. 2007a, b), self-deception (Akın 2011), social relationship, emotional intelligence, self-determination (Neff 2003a), social support (Akin et al. 2011), and relational-inter-dependent self construal (Akın and Eroglu 2013). On the contrary self-compassion was found negatively associated with depression, anxiety, rumination, thought suppression (Neff 2003b), interpersonal cognitive distortions (Akın 2010a), automatic thoughts (Akın 2012), loneliness (Akın 2010b), submissive behavior (Akın 2009), social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation (Werner et al. 2012), performance-approach/avoidance goals (Akın 2008b), internet addiction (Iskender and Akin 2010), and neuroticism (Neff et al. 2007b).

1.2 Sense of Community

Sense of community was first conceptualized by Sarason (1974) to describe the importance of belonging to and being an integral part of a larger society. Sarason used this construct to represent the strength of bonding among community members and argued that it is central to well-being because it reflects inter-relationships and membership with a greater range of people (Hombrados-Mendieta et al. 2013; Townley et al. 2013). Later McMillan and Chavis (1986) has expanded the definition and described sense of community as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). These authors proposed a four-dimensional sense of community model:

Membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Membership refers to the feeling of belongingness and identification with the group (which includes perception of shared boundaries, history and symbols; feeling of emotional safety and personal investment in the community). Influence represents the opportunity of individuals to participate to community life through their own contributions in mutual relationships (perceived effect that a person has over the decisions and actions of the community). Integration and fulfillment of needs places importance on common needs, goals, and beliefs among group members and refers to the benefits that people derive from their membership to a community. This dimension also indicates a positive association between individuals and their community through which they satisfy personal needs and needs as a group or community member. Shared emotional connection reflects the sharing of a common history and the bonds developed over time between group members (Albanesi et al. 2007; Elvira et al. 2008; Townley et al. 2013). More recently Obst et al. (2002) have suggested and empirically proved a fifth related dimension of sense of community: The extent to which individuals identify with their community, in other words, community identification.

Sense of community has important influences on relationships among individuals in communities and collective behaviors and is a catalyst for social involvement and participation in the community (Chavis and Wandersman 1990; Davidson and Cotter 1986; Obst et al. 2002; Perkins et al. 1990; Townley et al. 2009). In addition, sense of community is associated with levels of social attachment among individuals and is indicative of social engagement. Sense of community has also been linked to perceptions of belonging, community connectedness (Sonn and Fisher 1996), group membership, social well-being, civic engagement (Albanesi et al. 2007), and companionship (Oh et al. 2014).

Research has consistently shown that sense of community, is related positively to adaptive psychological outcomes such as empowerment, sense of efficacy, life satisfaction, happiness (Chavis and Wandersman 1990; Farrell and Coulombe 2004), subjective well-being (Davidson and Cotter 1991), social support (Li et al. 2011), positive affect (Kenyon et al. 2011; Oh et al. 2014), increased psychological well-being (Pretty et al. 1996; Prezza et al. 2001), quality of life (Gattino et al. 2013), life satisfaction, and appraisal support (Oh et al. 2014). On the contrary feelings of alienation, loneliness (Prezza and Pacilli 2007), suicide (Farrell and Coulombe 2004), depressive symptoms (Li et al. 2011), and negative effect (Oh et al. 2014) were inversely related to sense of community. Furthermore, studies (Banyard and Williams 2007; Greenfield and Marks 2010) demonstrated that sense of community has a moderate effect on the relations between traumatic experiences and psychological distress (Li et al. 2011).

1.3 The Present Study

Although numerous studies has been conducted to investigate the impact of self-compassion on individual functioning, little research has examined the role of self-compassion in the context of social issues and thus little is known about the interpersonal implications of self-compassion. Thus it may be worthwhile to investigate the predictive role of the self-compassion on sense of community. The purpose of the present research is to do this.

Research (Baker and McNulty 2011; Leary et al. 2007; Neff et al. 2005) demonstrated that self-compassion buffers individuals against the negative social implications of their failures. Correspondingly studies have documented a plethora of interpersonal and social benefits of self-compassion such as; extraversion (Neff et al. 2007a), social relationship,

self-determination (Neff 2003a), social relatedness (Neff 2003b), and social support (Akın et al. 2011). Also individuals with self-compassion are more likely to have fulfilled needs for relatedness (Neff 2003a), reported less negative self-feelings after imagining a stressful social event than did less self-compassionate people (Baker and McNulty 2011; Leary et al. 2007). This may facilitate connection of the people with their community, therefore self-compassion appears to enhance interpersonal well-being and there may be a positive link between self-compassion and sense of community. Based on the above relationships of self-compassion with social variables it was hypothesized that self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness would be associated positively and self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification would be associated negatively with sense of community.

2 Methods

The study is a quantitative research based on descriptive-correlational design which used self-administered questionnaires. This study was structured to examine the relationships between self-compassion and sense of community.

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study included 401 Turkish adolescents from eight high schools. These participants were selected from four different districts of Turkey; (a) Northwest Marmara 107 (26 %), (b) Thracian 88 (22 %), (c) East Anatolian 103 (26 %), and (d) Mediterranean 103 (26 %). Of the participants 211 (53 %) were girls and 190 (47 %) were boys. Ninety participants were freshmen, along with 107 sophomores, 116 juniors, and 88 seniors. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years old ($M = 16.3$, SD $= 1.04$). The high schools are comprised of mostly students who come from middle SES homes. In the selection of participants convenience sampling was used in which participants are selected because of their proximity and convenient accessibility to the researcher.

2.2 Measures

Self-compassion Scale. Self-compassion was measured by using Self-compassion Scale (Neff 2003b). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın et al. (2007). Self-compassion Scale is a 26-item self-report measurement and consists of six sub-scales; self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were .94, .94, .87, .89, .92, and .94 for six subscales, respectively. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit. The goodness of fit index values of the model were $x^2 = 779.01$, $df = 264$, RMSEA $= .056$, NFI $= .95$, CFI $= .97$, IFI $= .97$, RFI $= .94$, GFI $= .91$, and SRMR $= .059$. The internal consistency coefficients were .77, .72, .72, .80, .74, and .74 and the 3-week interval test–retest reliability coefficients were .69, .59, .66, .60, .69, and .56, for six subscales, respectively. The corrected item–total correlations of the scale ranged from .48 to .71.

Sense of Community Scale (Chiessi et al. 2010). The scale was used to measure sense of community and consists of 20 items 5-point Likert (0 = *not at all true* to 4 = *completely true*). Ratings were summed for a total score (possible range 0–80). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akin et al. (2012). The goodness of fit index values of the

model were $x^2 = 637.53$, $df = 161$, RMSEA $= .087$, CFI $= .91$, IFI $= .91$, SRMR $= .076$. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was .87 and the 3-weeks interval test–retest reliability coefficient was .84. The corrected item–total correlations of the scale ranged from .35 to .62.

2.3 Procedure

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related heads of departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about purposes of the study.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

In this research, stepwise multiple regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationships between self-compassion and sense of community. The variables which were entered in multiple regression analysis were measured by summing the items of each scale. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 11.5.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Self-kindness ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), common humanity ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), and mindfulness ($r = .35$, $p < .01$) were found positively and self-judgment ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), isolation ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$), and over-identification ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$) were found negatively associated with sense of community. There were also significant correlations between dimensions of self-compassion.

3.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The data were examined for normality by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test indicated normality of distributions of test scores for all tests in the current study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is .001 or less (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001). Based on this criterion, 22 data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted. Multi-collinearity was checked by the tolerance and conditional index values. All tolerance values were above .20 and all conditional index values were less than .15 which indicated that there were no multi-collinearity problems (O'Brien 2007). Multiple regression analysis was performed in which the dependent variable was sense of community and the independent variables were dimensions of self-compassion (Table 2). As many of those

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, alphas, and inter-correlations of the variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-kindness	–						
2. Self-judgment	−.28**	–					
3. Commond humanity	.56**	−.18**	–				
4. Isolation	−.22**	.57**	−.11*	–			
5. Mindfulness	.68**	−.28**	.64**	−.21**	–		
6. Over-identification	−.22**	.60**	−.17**	.64**	−.32**	–	
7. Sense of community	.34**	−.17**	.34**	−.18**	.35**	−.14**	–
Mean	14.80	11.73	11.43	11.06	12.14	10.65	45.02
Standard deviation	4.07	4.57	3.35	3.77	3.76	3.71	12.20
Alpha	.70	.69	.71	.75	.83	.74	.80

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

predictor variables were dependent on each other, forward stepwise procedure, which includes one new explanatory variable at each step, specifically the most associated with the dependent variable while being, at the same time, independent of the explanatory variables already included in the model. The criteria to include the variables from the regression model were: criterion probability-of-F-to enter ≤.05.

According to the results of multiple regression analysis, summarized in Table 2, mindfulness entered the equation first, accounting for 12 % of the variance in predicting sense of community ($R^2 = .12$, adjusted $R^2 = .12$, $F(1, 399) = 55,262$, $p < .01$). Common humanity entered on the second step accounting for an additional 2 % variance ($R^2 = .14$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 398) = 33,438$, $p < .01$). Isolation entered on the third step accounting for an additional 2 % variance ($R^2 = .16$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .15$, $F(3, 397) = 24,548$, $p < .01$). Self-kindness entered last, accounting for an additional 1 % variance ($R^2 = .17$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .16$, $F(4, 396) = 19,526$, $p < .01$). Despite the initial regression design included mindfulness, common humanity, self-kindness, over-identification, isolation, and self-judgment as independent variables, the last regression model involved mindfulness, common humanity, isolation, and self-kindness as predictors of sense of community and accounted for 17 % of the variance. The standardized beta coefficients indicated the relative influence of the variables in last model with mindfulness ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), common humanity ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), isolation ($\beta = −.10$, $p < .01$), and self-kindness ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$) and all significantly influencing sense of community and common humanity was strongest predictor.

4 Discussion

The goal of the present research is to investigate the predictive role of self-compassion on sense of community. Results showed that there are significant relationships between these two variables. To our knowledge, this is the first study investigating the relationships between self-compassion and sense of community. As expected self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness predicted sense of community positively. On the other hand, isolation predicted sense of community in a negative way. However over-identification and self-judgment did not emerge as significant predictors in the regression model. Briefly, it

Table 2 Summary of forward stepwise multiple regression analysis for variable predicting sense of community

Variables	B	Standard error of B	β	t
Step 1				
Mindfulness	1.133	.152	.349	7.434*
Step 2				
Mindfulness	.733	.195	.226	3.751*
Common humanity	.704	.219	.193	3.213*
Step 3				
Mindfulness	.647	.197	.199	3.279*
Common humanity	.719	.218	.197	3.298*
Isolation	−.371	.152	−.115	−2.437*
Step 4				
Mindfulness	.428	.226	.132	1.900*
Common humanity	.618	.223	.170	2.772*
Isolation	−.336	.153	−.104	−2.198*
Self-kindness	.384	.194	.128	1.979*

can be proposed that the sense of care, connectedness, and resilience provided by mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness, namely by self-compassion, both are associated with greater emotional well-being more generally (Neff 2009) and within the context of the feeling of the relationships well-being (Yarnell and Neff 2013). These findings are in line with the literature that has shown that self-compassion is closely associated with the indices of social adjustment such as extraversion (Neff et al. 2007), social relatedness (Neff 2003b), social relationship, self-determination (Neff 2003a), and social support (Akın et al. 2011). Result of the current study are also consistent with the findings of the research which showed that sense of community has a positive impact on relationships and that it is a catalyst for social involvement and participation in the community (Chavis and Wandersman 1990; Davidson and Cotter 1986; Obst et al. 2002; Perkins et al. 1990; Townley et al. 2009). Moreover sense of community has further social benefits such as social attachment, social engagement, perceptions of belonging, community connectedness (Sonn and Fisher 1996), group membership, social well-being, civic engagement (Albanesi et al. 2007), and companionship (Oh et al. 2014). Thus the positive associations of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness with sense of community are plausible.

In interpreting the results of the present findings, several plausible explanations exist. First, research showed that the degree to which individuals are gentle to themselves is related to how gentle they are to relationship partners, as assessed by spouse' perceptions of their behavior (Neff and Beretvas 2012). Indeed, when individuals are high in self-kindness, they were perceived by partners as being significantly more caring (i.e., affectionate, warm, and considerate). Second, since individuals with an awareness of common humanity accept themselves as imperfect human beings, they may be more tended to accept other's limitations (Neff and Beretvas 2012) and the connected and emotionally balanced stance of self-compassion may also associated with a greater ability to get along with others. Also these individuals do not meet the need for positive feelings by separating oneself from others but rather by incorporating appreciation of shared humanity into self-

attitudes (Neff et al. 2005). And third, higher levels of mindfulness decrease emotional turmoil when individuals decide how to resolve relationship conflicts. If a relationship problem appears, this state of awareness allows people to soothe and calm the intensity of their emotions, so that they can manage their problems in a more balanced and effective manner (Kelly et al. 2009). Similarly, it was found that individuals who have higher levels of self-kindness, awareness of common humanity, and mindfulness inclined to have more compassionate goals in their interpersonal relationships and to provide social support and encourage interpersonal trust with friends (Crocker and Canevello 2008). And this will ultimately contribute to the both their sense of family belonging and sense of involvement with their community.

Conversely, isolation dimension of self-compassion, which was found in the present negatively associated with sense of community, may lead to a type of self-absorption that blocks to sense of belonging to community. In addition feelings of separation have been shown to be highly associated with maladaptive social outcomes such as social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation (Werner et al. 2012), submissive behavior (Akın 2009), and loneliness (Akın 2010b). And thus, it is understandable that greater sense of self-kindness, awareness of common humanity, and mindfulness is linked to a greater sense of community within social environments, while greater sense of isolation is linked to low levels of sense of community (Yarnell and Neff 2013).

There are several limitations of this study that should be considered: (a) participants were high school students and replication of this study for targeting other populations should be made in order to generate a more solid relationship among the constructs examined in this study, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited, (b) as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive statements can be made about causality, and (c) the data reported here for self-compassion and sense of community are limited to self-reported data.

Consequently, the present research provides important information about the predictors of sense of community and suggests that self-compassion is associated with healthy relational functioning. Thus, the benefits of self-compassion may not only be personal, but also social. For that reason, counselors who work with individuals experiencing relationship conflicts with family, friends, or romantic partners might consider encouraging self-compassion as a way to solve these interpersonal problems in a psychologically beneficial manner (Germer 2009; Yarnell and Neff 2013). Additionally, encouraging the development of self-compassion should be useful individuals by helping them to counter destructive self-critical tendencies and deal with their negative emotions with greater clarity and equanimity (Neff 2003a). Clearly, however, more research needs to be done to understand how self-compassion is linked to functioning in social environments.

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